RELEASED IN PART
B6, B1, 1.4(D)

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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-01	ADS-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01
	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00	CIO-00	SP-00
	TRSE-00	T-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-10	PRME-01	DRL-04
	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/028W			

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R 251330Z FEB 98
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9822
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
USINT HAVANA
CIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USIA WASHDC 1441
USCINCSO MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000539

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/08
TAGS: PGOV, VE
SUBJECT: HUGO CHAVEZ CELEBRATES "DAY OF DIGNITY"

REF: (A) 97 CARACAS 4453 (B) CARACAS 254 (C) CARACAS 265

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CLASSIFIED BY [redacted] B6
REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY
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1. (C) FORMER COUP LEADER AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HUGO CHAVEZ CELEBRATED A "DAY OF DIGNITY" ON FEBRUARY 4 (4F), THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS COUP ATTEMPT. THIS CELEBRATION PROVIDED US AN

OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE CHAVEZ CAMPAIGNING AT THREE EVENTS: MASS AT THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL, A WREATH LAYING AT THE STATUE OF NATIONAL HERO SIMON BOLIVAR, AND A POLITICAL RALLY AT PLAZA CARACAS.

[redacted] B1

END SUMMARY.

MASS AT THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL AND A VISIT TO THE PLAZA BOLIVAR

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2. (C) CHAVEZ BEGAN HIS "DAY OF DIGNITY" WITH AN 11:00 A.M. WREATH LAYING CEREMONY AT THE TOMB OF NATIONAL HERO SIMON BOLIVAR AT THE NATIONAL PANTHEON. AT 3:00 P.M., HE ATTENDED A MASS WITH HIS SUPPORTERS AT THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL WHICH IS LOCATED ON PLAZA BOLIVAR. [redacted] THE CATHEDRAL WAS FILLED TO CAPACITY. AFTER MASS, CHAVEZ MOVED TO THE CENTER OF THE PLAZA TO THE EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF SIMON BOLIVAR TO ADDRESS A CROWD OF ABOUT 1,500. CHAVEZ CAMPAIGN WORKERS WERE VERY CAREFUL TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND ORDER, AND USED BULLHORNS TO ASK THE CROWD TO REMAIN CALM AND "RESPECTFUL ON THIS DAY OF DIGNITY." AFTER LAYING A WREATH AT THE BASE OF THE STATUE, CHAVEZ DECLARED THAT THE GOAL OF HIS CANDIDACY IS TO ACHIEVE "A MORE PERFECT DEMOCRACY AND HAPPINESS FOR ALL." CHAVEZ THEN CALLED FOR "RENOVATION AND REBIRTH TO (ENABLE) VENEZUELA TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF BOLIVAR BY THE YEAR 2000." HE DID NOT ENUNCIATE WHAT THE GOALS OF BOLIVAR ARE. CAMPAIGN SIGNS AT THE PLAZA CARRIED THE SLOGAN "FOR A PATRIOTIC DEMOCRACY." B1

ONLY 5,000 TURN OUT FOR RALLY AT PLAZA CARACAS

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3. (C) [redacted] PRESS REPORTS ESTIMATE THAT ABOUT 5,000 PEOPLE ATTENDED CHAVEZ' RALLY AT PLAZA CARACAS. THE THEME OF THE RALLY WAS "IT IS THE PEOPLE'S TURN (LE TOCA AL PUEBLO)." CHAVEZ HAD EARLIER (REFTEL C) PROMISED THAT HE WOULD DRAW 50,000 PEOPLE TO B1

THIS RALLY WHICH WAS TO MARK THE COMPLETION OF SERIES OF RALLIES HELD IN AND AROUND CARACAS OVER THE PREVIOUS THREE WEEKS. [redacted] B1
ESTIMATES THAT ONLY 1,000 TO 1,500 OF THE PEOPLE PRESENT WERE CONFIRMED CHAVEZ SUPPORTS. MOST OF THESE SUPPORTERS WERE FROM THE WORKING OR MARGINAL CLASSES, AND MANY WERE FROM OUTSIDE CARACAS. MOST WHO ATTENDED THE RALLY WERE CURIOUS BY-STANDERS RATHER THAN

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE RALLY, AND MANY ONLY PASSED BY DURING RUSH HOUR ON THEIR WAY HOME FROM WORK.

4. (C) CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS MANNED TABLES IN THE SQUARE PASSING OUT FIFTH REPUBLIC MOVEMENT(MVR) LITERATURE AND REGISTERING NEW PARTY MEMBER. REGISTRANTS WERE ASKED TO INDICATE WHICH "FRONT THEY WOULD BE JOINING IN THE FIGHT TO "REJUVENAE VENEZUELA AND VINDICATE THE DREAM OF BOLIVAR." EACH "FRONT" CORRESPONDS TO ONE OF VENEZUELA'S TATES. NEW PARTY MEMBERS WERE ALSO ASSIGNED TO DTACHMENTS TO MOBILIZE THE "ABSTAINERS" TO TURN OUTFOR CHAVEZ ON ELECTION DAY. PRIOR TO CHAVEZ' ARIVAL, ANNOUNCERS CALLED FORTH OFFICERS WHO PARTIIPATED IN CHAVEZ' COUP ATTEMPT INDICATING THE OBECTIVES SEIZED BY THE OFFICERS.

5. (C) WHEN CHVEZ ARRIVED AT THE RALLY, HE BRIEFLY ACKNOWLEDGED THE CROWD AND PROMPTLY PROCEEDED TO ASSEMBLE JOURALISTS AND CAMERAMEN AROUND HIM. AFTER ABOUT TWNTY MINUTES OBSERVING THE BACKS OF CAMERAMEN, TH CROWD BEGAN TO WHISTLE AND CALL FOR CHAVEZ TO ADRESS HIM. CHAVEZ USHERED THE NEWSMEN AWAY, AND TUNED TOWARD THE CROWD WHILE DONNING HIS SIGNATURERED BERET. LIKE POLITICAL RALLIES THE WORLD OVE, THERE WERE BANNERS, BALLOONS CORRESPONDING TO HE COLORS OF THE FLAG, AND BABY KISSING -- EXCEPT HRE THE BABY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 CARACAS 000539

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WORE CAMOUFLAGE.

AND THE NEWS IS? -- NO NEWS
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6. (C) DURING HIS SPEECH, CHAVEZ FAILED TO CAPITALIZE ON THREE WEEKS OF PREPARATORY WORK BY SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY OF THIS ANNIVERSARY TO MAKE ANY NEW PUBLIC STATEMENTS. ONCE AGAIN, CHAVEZ ASSERTED THAT HE DID NOT LAUNCH A COUP AGAINST DEMOCRACY SINCE DEMOCRACY DOES NOT EXIST IN VENEZUELA. CHAVEZ RECEIVED THE MOST APPLAUSE FOR HIS OFT STATED REMARK THAT HE ACTED "AGAINST CORRUPTOCRACY, AGAINST THE GENOCIDE OF [IMPEACHED PRESIDENT] CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ." CHAVEZ CONTINUED, "THE FOURTH OF FEBRUARY HAS NOT DIED, AND NOW COMES ANOTHER BATTLE OF THE PEOPLE, THE ONE WHICH WILL LIBERATE [THE NATION] -- THE SIXTH OF DECEMBER [ELECTION DAY]." COMMENTING THAT HE IS NOW "OPERATING ON THE ENEMY TERRAIN" AGAINST THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD), CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT (COPEI), AND MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALISM (MAS) PARTIES AND AGAINST FRONT-RUNNER IRENE SAEZ, CHAVEZ SAID "THE WEAPONS [WE WILL USE ON ELECTION DAY] ARE THE SAME: THE POPULAR VOTE." CHAVEZ ASSERTED THAT NINETY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION SUPPORTED HIS COUP ATTEMPT. CHAVEZ CONTINUES TO CALL FOR THE DISSOLUTION OF THE "DO NOTHING" CONGRESS, AND FOR THE CREATION OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CONGRESS (CONSTITUYENTE).

HE DID ADD THAT HE WOULD RENOUNCE THE PRESIDENCY IF THE PEOPLE DID NOT SUPPORT HIS CALL FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL CONGRESS, SOMETHING CHAVEZ CONSIDERS HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

7. (U) RATHER THAN COVERING THE RALLY DIRECTLY, THE CARACAS' LEADING DAILY "EL UNIVERSAL" CHOSE INSTEAD TO RUN A FULL PAGE

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ARTICLE ENTITLED "CHAVISTAS COMMEMORATE THE COUP IGNORING THE JUDGEMENTS AGAINST IT." CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT GUSTAVO TARRE BRICENO, ASKING RHETORICALLY IF IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THREE HUNDRED PEOPLE TO DIE IN THE COUP, ASKED "WOULD IT NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER IF CHAVEZ, INSTEAD OF LAUNCHING A COUP, FOUNDED A PARTY INSTEAD?" SOME COMMENTATORS NOTED THAT THE COUP AWOKE VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT TO THE NEED FOR A NEW NATIONAL PROJECT AND FOR NEW LEADERSHIP SO THAT COUPS COULD BE AVOIDED IN THE FUTURE. HISTORIAN MANUEL CABALLERO COMMENTED, "IT APPEARS TO ME TO BE THE HEIGHT OF CYNICISM THAT THE CHAVISTAS ARE CELEBRATING THE 4F (FOURTH OF FEBRUARY) AS A DAY OF NATIONAL DIGNITY WHEN THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE. . . . [HE] IS A TRAITOR OF THE NATION (PATRIA). . . . CHAVEZ IS CIVIL WAR." OTHER CARACAS DAILIES RAN BRIEF ARTICLES WHICH ESSENTIALLY NOTED THE EVENT.

27N TO SUPPORT CHAVEZ?
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8. (U) THE CARACAS DAILY "EL GLOBO" INTERVIEWED A PARTICIPANT IN THE FAILED NOVEMBER 27, 1992 COUP ATTEMPT, REAR ADMIRAL LUIS CABRERA AGUIRRE, REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY THAT PARTICIPANTS IN THE 27N WOULD SUPPORT CHAVEZ. CABRERA, WHO WAS PRESENT AT THE RALLY, SAID TO "EL GLOBO," "WE HOPE TO ESTABLISH A BLOCK OF OPINION, NOT A POLITICAL PARTY, THAT IS INTENDED TO INFORM ALL OF THE VISION OF THE COUNTRY THAT WE HAVE."

COMMENT

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B1

[redacted] BY CHOOSING RELATIVELY SMALL LOCATIONS FOR HIS THREE EVENTS -- THE CATHEDRAL, PLAZA BOLIVAR, AND PLAZA CARACAS -- EACH EVENT APPEARED ON CAMERA TO BE WELL ATTENDED. RECENT POLLIN SHOWS THAT CHAVEZ HAS PUSHED HIS POPULARITY LEVEL TO 11 PERCENT, PUTTING HIM IN SECOND PLACE BEHIND IRENE SAEZ. WITH THE MAJOR PARTIES YET TO IDENTIFY THEIR CANDIDATES, THE PRESS HAS FOCUSED ON SAEZ AND CHAVEZ AS THE CENTRAL PERSONALITIES OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AND REFERS TO THEM AS THE "THE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST." B1

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